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St. Patrick's Day - The Irish Fellowship Club

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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MARCH 17, 1965

ST. PATRICK'S DAY---1965

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Speech of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)
Given before The Irish Fellowship Club
At the Sheraton Chicago Hotel
Chicago, Illinois

Wednesday, March 17, 1965, 7:00 p.m., C.S.T.

I am here, tonight, at the invitation of an old friend, Leo Crowley, and I am delighted to be in Chicago for this occasion. It affords me an opportunity not only to join with you in the celebration of St. Patrick's Day but also to engage in some lobbying for Montana. It is a great state for touring and the best way to see it is by train. In fact, I have been urging Leo Crowley, for many months, to restore the Milwaukee passenger service in Montana. For months, he has been shaking his head negatively in response.

I have talked to him about human need and convenience. He has been very sympathetic. Then he has shown me cost figures and balance sheets.

I have said to him many times: "Leo, people will still ride on trains in Montana." He has said to me many times: "Mike, nobody rides on trains anymore, any place."

The stand-off has continued until now. It would be my hope that tonight might provide a break-through. I want to note that I had to refuse a speaking engagement with the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in Butte. Why? Because the Milwaukee doesn't go there anymore. I accepted, instead, Leo Crowley's invitation to come to Chicago.

I took the B & O out of Washington.

I thought, on the basis of what Leo Crowley had said, that I would be the only passenger.

The train was full.

So I want to say to Leo Crowley, tonight, if the B & O can, why can't the Milwaukee?

I shall not press for an immediate answer. It would be unfair to bind a good and long-time friend on the basis of the spirit or spirits of St. Patrick's Day.

May I say, further, that I do recognize--sometimes reluctantly--the inevitability of change. It is taking place not only in railroading but in every aspect of our life. We live in an era of vast change. We see it in our communities. We see it in our businesses. We see it in science and technology. We see it in our government and in the politics which underlies it. Not so long ago, if a man attended a St. Patrick's Day celebration it was safe to assume that he was not only a son of St. Patrick but a Catholic, poor, and a Democrat. Obviously, on the basis of the guest list tonight and the magnificence of this dinner, that assumption is no longer safe on any count. I should add, perhaps, that I still qualify on all counts.

Where change is greatest in our lives but where we do not see it or sense it so readily is in the world beyond our borders. It is to that world and our relations with it that I would address your attention for a few moments.

I do not think it inappropriate to introduce a serious note on a day usually given to conviviality. It ought not to be forgotten that the

the Saint--who is honored here, tonight, walked in a world which was neither pleasant nor carefree. Rather, it was a deeply troubled age in which the rock which had been Rome had crumbled. It, too, was a time of change. It was a time of chaos, born of ignorance and arrogance, of superstition and suffering. It was a time when an isolated and bucolic Ireland was at last being stirred into upheaval by a birth in a stable many miles and three or four centuries away.

And, tonight, I would remind you that St. Patrick's Day comes, not only to Chicago and the United States but to Saigon, Viet Nam and throughout a troubled Southeast Asia. In that distant region, halfway around the world from this city, there are those who will also celebrate this day. But the green they will wear will be the camouflage green of jungle warfare. In that region, too, there is the chaos born of ignorance and arrogance and of superstition and suffering. There is upheaval and change--immediate and incipient, in Viet Nam and throughout Southeast Asia. A region of immense size is involved. It is a region larger than the United States and composed of as many human beings as live in our country plus many millions more.

There, too, the rocks of stability have crumbled in these years of our times. The peace of the rice-fields and the quiet of the jungle have been shattered. A culture of many cultures, a politics of many politics, a people of many peoples have been caught up in the fury of a vast upheaval. This upheaval is not necessarily what many of the inhabitants may have sought. But whether sought or not, they are engulfed by it and they must live with it and work out their own destinies within its dimensions.

Into this vast change in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, our own nation has been projected. It is a recent involvement which, for a long time, was scarcely perceptible. Indeed, it is difficult to grasp the rapidity and the extent of our involvement in Southeast Asia without having had some firsthand experience with it from the onset. When I first visited Southeast Asia a dozen years ago, I had to check a map to be certain of the capital cities of the more remote nations. And the maps often did not agree, so little interest was there in that part of the world at the time. When I visited Laos in 1953, I found two Americans--two Americans--in the entire country and both on official assignment. When I visited Saigon in that same year, there were scarcely 100 Americans in all of Viet Nam, including the North.

Now, a dozen years later, the number of Americans in Viet Nam--in South Viet Nam alone--is in the vicinity of 30,000 and, according to the latest reports, there are, even now, requests from Saigon for the assignment of additional United States Army troops. The need for American personnel in order to prevent a collapse in South Viet Nam has increased steadily in the past four years. It has increased drastically since the unfortunate and distressing assassination of the one Vietnamese leader who had managed to maintain a measure of stability in South Viet Nam--the late President Ngo Dinh Diem. In place of his steady hand, there has been a succession of hands produced by coup-on-coup in Saigon.

Many of us who have witnessed this growing involvement over the years have been deeply concerned by it. That is no secret. I, personally,

have expressed that concern many times in the past. Yet the fact remains that three Presidents in succession--Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson have found no satisfactory and persuasive alternative to it. And so far as I can see, the prospects now are that the American involvement in Viet Nam will deepen further before it lightens.

Let me say, in all frankness, that I do not know when and on what terms the conflict in Viet Nam will end. I can tell you that the President has no intention of permitting it to end in a sudden and abject withdrawal of American forces. But I am persuaded, too, that it will end at some time as all conflicts eventually end, at a conference table. It is significant that such public opinion polls as have been taken reflect the same view. A vast majority of the American people express support, both, for the military measures which the President must take and the hope for an end of this conflict.

In short, the American attitude, insofar as it is reflected in these indicators, was formulated originally by the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. He expressed in it--as he knew so well how to express--the dual sentiment which resides in the heart of America. We will do, as Americans, whatever needs to be done to insure justice and the national tranquility. But we will not glorify war as an end in itself. In Viet Nam, we do not desire the sacrifice of a single life beyond what may be necessary to bring about an equitable solution.

There are those who say "let us withdraw" which we will not and those who say "let's get it over now" which is not a prescription for victory. It is an invitation to an extended war which will take us on a road that leads ever deeper into Asia. It may come to that in the end, no matter how we may seek to prevent it, no matter what forbearance and restraint we may practice. That, no man can foretell. But I can tell you that the President of the United States who bears the terrible responsibility of decision, whose finger is on the nuclear trigger, has not hearkened to the siren call of easy victory in Asia, or anywhere else. In this respect, President Johnson carries the same burdens as his predecessors, the late John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Dwight D. Eisenhower. And all of them have recognized, under the weight of these burdens, the necessity for prudence and restraint.

There are no quick or easy answers to the difficulties in Southeast Asia. But there are solutions--just solutions--if all concerned face the realities of the situation in Viet Nam. And the sooner all concerned recognize these realities and are prepared to begin an earnest search for these solutions, the better. The natural

jungles of Viet Nam are extensive enough without adding to them the manmade wastelands of war. The lot of the people of Viet Nam--north and south--is bitter enough without the acrid additions of a spreading and deepening conflict.

The President has no choice but to continue on the course now being followed unless those who have engaged us are prepared to face these realities. And from the point of view of our own national interests, it is essential that we consider what it is that has prompted us to make and to continue to make the sacrifices of life and resources which we have borne in Viet Nam. I would point out to you, that current estimates place that cost at two millions a day, not to speak of the priceless lives which have been spent and will be spent. These costs are not declining; they are rising. I would point out to you, further, that by far the largest single expenditure of foreign aid goes to Viet Nam.

I do not want these sacrifices and, particularly, the sacrifices of lives to go on one day longer than necessary. I know that you do not want that either and I am certain that the President does not.

But neither do we wish--any of us--to abandon, half down the road, a burden which was lifted in the interests of freedom and in our own security.

That is the only context in which a just peace can be sought in Viet Nam. And it is in that context that I ask you, tonight, to consider the principles of our national interests in that remote region and with the vast changes which have occurred in Asia and in the world during our lifetime.

As a first principle, I would suggest that we seek no colonies, or bases or any other permanent American establishment in Viet Nam or on the Southeast Asian mainland; and what we do not seek for ourselves we will oppose for any other outside power.

Second, I would suggest that we seek, not to dominate, but to live in an equitable peace and in a peaceful commerce and communion with all the people of Southeast Asia; and what we seek for ourselves we recognize as the right of others to seek for themselves.

And, third, I would suggest that we are prepared for an end to the use of force throughout Viet Nam at the earliest date consistent with the right of the peoples of that region to determine their society for themselves, free from the terror and aggression which has plagued them for too many years. What we are prepared to forego, we insist that others must also be prepared to forego.

So far as I can see, that is all we seek in Viet Nam and South-east Asia and that is all we should seek in good conscience and in good sense in that remote situation.

I wish I could tell you that Viet Nam is all that need intrude in the way of international concern on this pleasant gathering tonight. But I cannot, in all honesty, omit reference to the changes which are occurring in Africa and, notably, in the Congo. There, too, in remote and little known places, a new era is emerging from beneath the crumbled stability which heretofore was imposed from without. The colonies are gone or almost gone. In their wake has appeared a churning mixture of nationalism, tribalism, racialism, democracy, Communism, Islamism, and Christianity. And the whole is heated with the immense and oppressive poverty of the millions of people who inhabit the continent.

Here, the American involvement is, as it once was in Indochina, minimal, and scarcely perceptible. Here, too, there are those, including myself, who have expressed a concern over the years that the involvement in Africa might deepen beyond what was necessary and appropriate. Here, too, as it is on the Asian mainland, the American interest is limited. Here, too,

it can be nothing more than support of African freedom in stability and of peaceful commerce and communion with the peoples of Africa.

There was hope, not so long ago, that the United Nations would provide an avenue through the quicksands of African change into an era of peaceful relations. There was a hope, not so long ago that the United Nations would provide a buffer to insulate the emergent nations from the clashing interests of outside powers. But that hope foundered in what transpired in the Congo. And it has been assailed, again, by the organizational disarray and the financial difficulties of the United Nations. So I would say to you, tonight, that unless there is a rebirth of capacity in the United Nations to deal with these matters, the United States, along with other nations, is likely to be plunged more deeply and more directly into the affairs of the African continent. The world may well face in Africa in the near future what it now sees in the critical confrontation in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia.

The situation which exists elsewhere in the world is neither as grim as that in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia nor as ominous as that of the Congo and Africa. The danger signs remain in the Middle East, to be sure. The division of Berlin and Germany and the division of Korea are reminders of the unfinished business of past wars which at any time may demand final resolution.

But, there is another side of the coin. In Latin America, for example, the Cuban experience--shattering as it was--has not been repeated elsewhere. The Alliance for Progress which was set in motion by the late President Kennedy has been continued with vigor under President Johnson.

It has been, by all reports, most effective and most helpful in assisting the Republics to the south to strengthen their stability and to accelerate their progress. Some of the Latin American nations, notably Mexico, have scored enormous economic advances. And as this progress has become manifest, our commercial and other relations with that nation have benefitted greatly.

In Western Europe, there has been a sustained stability and economic advance. On the other side of the continent, the eastern Europeans are obviously exerting a greater degree of independence than at any time in recent memory.

These changes for the better are of immense importance to all of us. Western Europe is no longer as it was, scarcely 15 years ago, totally dependent on us for its survival in freedom. Eastern Europe is no longer automatically responsive to the call of Soviet command. Indeed, even Albania, not to mention Yugoslavia, is capable of ignoring that call and others, if they cannot yet say "no", can at least say, "yes, but...."

For us, these changes infer the need for continuous adjustment in our policies within the basic design of our relations with Europe. I am hopeful that we will retain a close communication with Western Europe and, to that end, do whatever can be done to close the unfortunate breach in warmth and understanding which has opened with France. At the same time, I would also hope that we might continue to lighten the burden of expense for the defense of Western Europe which we have borne in a somewhat one-sided arrangement since the end of the war. And the same would apply in the matter of

foreign aid, at a time when Europe is generally in a good position to share these costs in a more equitable fashion.

And I would suggest, finally, that if we are to make the adjustments which are necessary in this era of change that we abandon, at last, the cliches of isolationism or internationalism. Neither can meet the needs of the nation in these critical times. There is no turning back the clock. But neither is there any virtue in keeping the hands of the clock ahead of the actual time.

It is not isolationism or internationalism to consider the principles of a just peace in Viet Nam even as we pursue the bitter conflict in which we have become involved and with which we must stay until that peace is achieved. It is common sense and sound national and international interest.

It is neither isolationism nor internationalism to consider other means--through a restored and reorganized and financially stable United Nations, if that is possible--to avoid a series of Viet Nams in Africa. It is common sense and sound national and international interest.

It is not isolationism nor internationalism to consider ways of diffusing the burdens of responsibility and costs which we still carry, largely in a one-sided fashion for the defense of the West and for foreign aid at a time when we are in balance-of-payments difficulties and Europe has a greater capacity than heretofore. It is common sense and sound national and international interest.

These, then, are the thoughts which I would leave with you tonight. And I would ask you for patience and trust of the President, whose burdens are

great as are those of any President. I would ask you to think through these immensely difficult questions of foreign relations so that you will understand what it is that confronts him. I would ask you, even when you differ with him, to appreciate that he is acting, as God gives him the capacity, in the interests of the people of the nation and for the peace and security of all of us.